

P. Mc Gill, Ralph
Peace Corps
CIA-4-01 Peace Corps

A Compliment

African Notes—One afternoon in a long post-luncheon talk a minister of an East African state said to me, quietly and with obvious pleasure: "We think your ambassadors to countries in our area are very good. We do not believe any is a CIA agent."

He meant it as a compliment and I so took it. I also took it as an opportunity to say, truthfully, that I did not know any CIA personnel, but that from those who did know them, I believed them to be men of understanding and with a sympathy toward aspirations of the new states. Certainly none was an ambassador. The point was, I said, that so long as nations are confronted with reckless, conniving and unscrupulous opposition, then intelligence agencies would continue to be necessary. I told him I hoped his own country had a very efficient intelligence unit. He looked blank and said he knew nothing about it. I congratulated him on this and said his lack of knowledge was proper.



Ralph McGill

Our own CIA, which is the equivalent of similar organizations in England, France, Russia, China and all nations, however small, was brought into trouble, one learns, by blunders of judgment by the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. He was a great man for brinkmanship.

He was a good, well meaning man, but perhaps was one of our most unfortunate choices for so important a post, especially as the critical period in which he operated required more sophistication and understanding than he commanded. The CIA is not an invisible government. It has been made the subject of books by persons who had vivid imaginations and an ability to expand very little into many pages of supposition.

Such publications pretending to expose the CIA have made it convenient for every African politician kicked out of his government for corruption or for taking money

from agents seeking to subvert his government to charge he was a victim of the CIA. It is a reasonable conclusion that while the CIA has undoubtedly made some errors, it is the victim of a good deal of trashy so-called "expose" stuff and is more sinned against than sinning.

It still is inspiring and satisfying to encounter Peace Corps groups. History will write them down as one of the best innovations of American policy. One may be reasonably sure that former President Eisenhower, who once dismissed the Peace Corps idea, when proposed by the Kennedy administration, as "a foolish idea of 15-year-old kids in the jungle," has regretted his early evaluation.

The young Peace Corps members are hungry for news from home—and puzzled by much of what they hear about home. They are not much amused by the reports of "young conservatives" who attack Washington for "taxing whatever enterprise earns." They have done everything—taught school, taught sanitation; dug drains and wells; tended sick babies and adults; helped with farming, with fishing, and with medical cases.

They have worked with human beings at the basic level of human needs. They know first hand that most of the people in the world go hungry; that millions are undernourished and chronically sick with tropical diseases, parasites and malaras. When they go home they will, I believe, prove to be a leaven in our society. They will not have much sympathy for those who complain that foreign aid is pouring money down ratholes. They know that our aid policies, even including the failures and errors, were honorable in motive. We have not used aid to oppress or conquer, to take territory or trade.

When I see the Peace Corps members in out-of-the-way, distant lands, I regret to say I compare them with the sterility of much of the average and usual "church" activity at home.

I went back to my room one night with a Peace Corps girl's words in my mind: "You know," she said, "some times I think the real problems of the future are at home—not in foreign places."